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ABSTRACT

While reading and writing are both language processes and a natural relationship between the two could be assumed, they have generally been studied and taught separately--one as a production process and the other as a reception process. There has recently been increased interest in the relationship in the education community. The source of this interest seems to be changed conceptualizations of the knowledge required and the thinking involved in both processes. Attempts to describe the relationship are still fragmented, but some cogent theories have been formed. One of these theories is that both reading and writing are meaning composing processes, and the other theory is that experience in one process has an impact on the other. Research studies either have been correlational or have sought to examine the impact of one process on the other. Research results suggest that there are some benefits from teaching reading and writing together, provided instruction is given in both with the intent of building on their similarities. Results have also shown that replacing isolated grammar study with reading in a writing class is beneficial. A review of existing research might lead to the conclusion that there is theoretical and empirical support for teaching reading and writing together. It is important to remember, however, that there is not yet a comprehensive description of the relationship between the two and that much more research needs to be done. (FL)

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Support for Reading and Writing As Shared Developmental Processes

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Running head: SUPPORT FOR READING AND WRITING AS SHARED DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

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Abstract

While reading and writing are both language processes and a natural relationship could be assumed, they have generally been studied and taught separately, one perceived as a production process and the other a reception process. The inclusion of The Reading Writing Relationship as an ERIC descriptor in the middle of 1981 attests to a new interest in the connection of the acts. The source of this interest seems to be changed conceptualizations of the knowledge required and the thinking involved in both processes. Attempts to describe the relationship are still fragmented, but some cogent theories have been posed. One of these is that both are similar meaning composing processes and the other is that experience in one impacts on the other. Research studies have either been correlational or sought to examine the impact of one on the other. The results suggests that there are some benefits from teaching them together if instruction is given in both with the intent of building on their similarities. The results also show that replacing isolated grammar study with reading in a writing class is beneficial. Other instructional implications can be drawn from a review of the literature on the reading writing relationship.

Support for Reading and Writing As Shared Developmental Processes

While reading and writing are both language processes and a natural relationship could be assumed, they have generally been studied and taught separately. The focus has been upon the differences of the two as production and reception processes. The writer sends a message using the written code; the reader receives the message by breaking the written code. This perceived difference led to their separation in the curriculum, and a system of education that not only separates but isolates areas of study has not encouraged interaction. Teachers have been trained as specialists in one and not the other. Few people have crossed the boundaries of their disciplines to study or integrate these language processess (Petrosky, 1982).

Recently, however, researchers and practitioners have begun to reexamine assumptions about the reading-writing relatioship. The inclusion of The Reading Writing Relationship as an ERIC descriptor in the middle of 1981 attests to this fact. As one looks at this descriptor, a series of questions comes to mind. What is the source of this new interest? Is there theoretical and empirical support for a strong relationship between the two? If so, what are the instructional implications?

Source of Interest

A review of both reading and writing literature, reveals that renewed interest in the reading-writing relationship is coming from a changed conceptualization of both acts. These conceptualizations

appear to be the result of a shift to the study of the processes of the mind, the thinking that underlies the act, in both fields.

Reading is no longer perceived as a simple receptive process in which the reader passively receives some absolute meaning the writer put on the page. Instead it is viewed as a generative process in which the reader constructs his/her own model of the text (Wittrock, 1975; Spiro, 1980, Petrosky, 1982; Schank, 1982). Even what appears to be the most literal statement requires the reader to construct meaning using prior knowledge and experience. To illustrate this, Schank (1982) notes that the simple statement, John wants an aspirin leads to the inference that John has a pain and John believes that aspirins relieve pain, ideas that are not on the page. This construction of meaning is not only influenced by the reader's prior knowledge but by his/her world view. World view entails more than just prior knowledge of the subject; it includes rules which govern all behavior. The context or situation in which the reading act occurs also influences comprehension because from this the reader gets his concept of the task and perspective. This conceptualization of reading negates the idea of absolute meaning put in the code by the writer and recognizes the idiosyncratic nature of comprehension. The question is not did the reader understand, but what did he/she understand.

The conceptualization of writing has been expanded beyond simple correct presentation to the recognition of writing as a meaning construction process (Cooper & Odell, 1978; Beaugrande,

1979; Flower & Hayes, 1981). The old notion that writers begin with something to say and then are simply concerned with correct form has given way to the idea that the writers begins with their own knowledge, experience and world view and that in the process of writing they constructs meaning. The product of writing is most often a restructured form of one's knowledge and experience, new insights. Like readers, writers are influence by their perception of the task and the situation in which the act occurs. Writing can be a problem solving, concept forming process. Success is dependent upon understanding and employing the appropriate thought processes. This new conceptualization of writing relegates correctness of form to a secondary position.

It is not difficult to notice similarities of reading and writing in this brief description of the two. Reading and writing theorist working separately began to notice such similarities and began calling for clarification of the connection between reading and writing.

The Reading-Writing Connection

Theories describing the relationship beyond the obvious dependency on the same code are very new; and, as one might expect, still quite fragmented. Two of the most cogent explanations are 1) reading and writing are analogous meaning composing processes (Petrosky, 1982; Tierney and Pearson, 1983; Wittrock, 1983) and 2) experience in one impacts upon the other (Elkind, 1976; Chomsky, 1979; Shanahnan, 1980; Petrosky, 1982; Eckhoff, 1983; Smith, 1983).

Analogous Meaning Composing Processes.

Tierney and Pearson illustrate the meaning composing relationship by delineating aspects of the composing process held in parallel by reading and writing. They use some essential of effective composing: planning, drafting, aligning, revising and monitoring.

Planning involves goal-setting and knowledge mobilization which includes setting purposes, evaluating current state of knowledge about the topic, focusing or narrowing topics and goals, and self-questioning. A writer's goals may be "procedural (e.g., how do I approach this topic), substantive (e.g., I want to say something about how rockets work), or intentional (e.g., I want to convince people of the problem)." The readers's goals may follow the same pattern: "procedural (e.g., I want to get a sense of this topic overall), substantive (e.g., I need to find out about the relationship between England and France), or intentional (e.g., I wonder what this author is trying to say)" (P. 571). Both the reader and the writer make adjustments as they proceed. Goals interacting with the knowledge that is mobilized by the reader and the writer influence what is produced or understood in a text.

Drafting and alignment are also shared processes. Drafting is the refinement of meaning. Just as the writer might use a first draft to explore what he/she wants to say; a reader may scan the text in a preliminary way to explore the range of knowledge and

goals to call upon. This could be considered the first draft of the model of the text that the readers is constructing. Alignment is the stances a reader or writer assumes in collaboration with the author or audience. For the writer a stance might be intimate, challenging or neutral; and collaboration might be through a character or as an observer. For the reader a stance might be sympathetic, critical or passive, and collaboration might be as an observer, participant or character. The authors note that the alignment the reader adopts influences what is recalled. Good readers and writers try out different alignments as they seek to construct meaning.

Trying out different alignments is a kind of revising. Revision is commonly thought of in terms of writing, but Tierney and Pearson posit that revision is also an important behavior in reading. "If readers are to develop some control over and a sense of discovery with the models of meaning they build, they must approach text with the same deliberation, time, and reflection that a writer employs as she revises a text" (p.576). Revision for the writer is much more than editing surface errors; it is repeatedly rereading, reexamining, deleting, shaping, and correcting to achieve the desired emphasis and proportion.

The last parallel between reading and writing offered by Tierney and Pearson is monitoring, the removing of oneself from the text to evaluate what has been created. Both the good reader and writer seek that inner voice that counsels, judges and prompts in

terms of the goals either has set.

Impact of Experience In One On The Other.

A second theory of the relationship of reading and writing is simply that experiences in one process will have an impact upon the other. There are those who claim that writing experience has a positive effect on reading achievement (Elkind, 1976; Shanahan, 1980; Petrosky 1982). Rehersal provided by writing fixes orthographic-phonemic patterns. Writing also increases awareness of grammatical structures especially syntactic complexity. Numerous studies have shown a high correlation between use of complex sentence patterns and reading ability. Closely related is the idea that manipulation of organizational structure enhances the use of such structure in comprehension. Written responses to what has been read can be an idea clarifying process. Writing also provides an opportunity for students to experiment with words, to test their understanding and to make usage more precise, if feedback is available. Lastly, interest in reading is often preceded by interest in copying in young children, and the need to write often encourages students to read to gather information to write.

Others proclaim the positive effect of reading experiences on writing. Eckhoff (1983) posits that punctuation as well as complex language patterns are learned through reading exposure. Frank Smith (1983) concurrs. Smith states that through a certain kind of reading writers may learn all the intangibiles they know about

writing. Writing is too complex to be taught totally through formal instructional experiences. For example, there are too many spelling rules with too many exceptions to be learned in isolation. Also punctuation and capitalization and other rule of grammar are too circular to be learned outside of natural experience. In addition, there are too many genres with formats that vary with purposes to teach them all formally. Murray (1982) notes that a writer cannot write without reading and that good writing requires some rather sophisticated reading which may be quite different from simply decoding someone else's finished text.

Synthesis of Research

As cogent as the above theories may seem, the responsible question is whether there is research to support them. In 1983 Sandra Stotsky synthesized the findings of research on the reading-writing relationship. She discovered that most of the research had either been correlational or sought to examine the influence of writing on reading or the influence of reading on writing. Most of these studies used expository or informational reading materials and essay writing as measurements, focused on higher educational levels, and were concerned with instructional intervention. According to Stotsky, the results of correlational studies indicate that 1) better writers are better and more prolific readers than poor writers and 2) better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers.

The results of the empirical studies suggest: 1) Teaching

writing or using writing exercises primarily to improve writing and measuring the effects on reading does not significntly affect reading performance. 2) Using writing activities or exercises specifically to improve reading comprehension or retention of information in instructional material almost always produces signifcant gains. 3) Providing reading experieces in place of grammar study or additional writing practice is as beneficial, or more beneficial, than either grammar study or additionl writing practice. 4) Using literary models produces signifcant gains in writing. 5) Seeking to improve writing through reading instruction alone is generally ineffective. 6) Writing instruction and writing activities designed to improve free writing has a limited effect on reading comprehenson.

Instructional Implications

A number of instructional implications can be gleaned from the conceptualizations, theories, and research findings discussed to this point. Perhaps, the most obvious is that there can be some benefit in teaching the two processes together. Other implications are:

1. Both reading and writing need to be taught as thinking processes. Students need to be taught that there is no meaning on the page and that they must generate it. The concern should be with effective thinking strategies for making meaning within the constraints of the text and the reader or writer's purpose, not with discreet, isolated subskills.

2. The idiosyncratic nature of meaning construction must be recognized. Students might be given opportunities to clarify their own understanding by substituting structured written responses for comprehension questions. First, they may be asked to give their interpretation and then to substantiate it with references to their prior knoweledge and to the text. Students may be asked to judge each other's responses in terms of possible interpretations.

3. Though correct form is important in the writing process, it is not the most important and should be the last concern, not the first.

4. It is beneficial for students to analyze literary models and write papers that are close to what they might need to produce in their real world experiences. Students produce better products when they percieve the task as being personally meaningful. Also, the what-is-your-favorite-television-show writing experience does not necessarily transfer to a persuasion paper for a political science class.

5. Readers and writers both can benefit from being led through the composing stages so that they see that composing effectively as a reader or a writer is a multistaged process.

6. Reading and writing experiences which will expand prior knowledge and world view are essential.

7. Reading and writing is a tug of war between the reader and author; thus, practicing taking the perspective of the other can enhance the construction of meaning in either process.

enhance the construction of meaning in either process.

In summary, one might conclude that there is theoretical and empirical support for teaching reading and writing together. However, one must recognize that there is not yet a comprehensive description of the relationship between the two and that much more research needs to be done. Yet, much of this can come from those who do teach the two together.

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